

Christmas 2019

I want to speak to you this evening on the subject of **Life's Greatest Gift** . . . but first a scene from the Peanuts comic strip.

Lucy and Linus have sat down for Christmas dinner, and the time has come for pulling the wishbone, apparently a time-honoured tradition in their household.

Lucy sets about to explain to her younger brother how the operation works.

First, each makes a wish. Then together they pull the bone apart, and whoever gets the larger piece will get his wish.

“Do I have to say my wish out loud?” asks Linus.

“Of course,” says Lucy, and begins announcing her ‘modest’ list:

“Four sweaters, a new bike, a new dress, a pair of roller-skates and one hundred dollars.”

She pauses, and Linus begins his:

“Long life for all my friends, / world peace / and the advancement of medical research.”

Lucy throws away the bone and says:

“That’s the problem with you, Linus, you always spoiling everything.”

I guess Christians do that at times. They do when they break out of the rat-race of buying and spending and begin to speak of ethereal things. That makes some people uncomfortable.

That reminds me of a story of two women in a shop looking at a table of Christmas cards.

One picks up a boxed assortment with a picture of Mary and her baby on the front. She glances at it and casts it aside and says to her friend:

“Damned old holy cards. The church is even trying to butt in on Christmas these days!”

Not many will go as far as this lady, but I fear many do get so caught up with ‘Black Friday’ sales and the placing of Amazon orders online that the focus of Christmas gets skewed.

Someone has said: **“We are a country of consumers and commerce.”**

And, I dare say there is a lot of truth in that statement.

With that said, it is gratifying to see that “Christmas” has made a come-back this year.

It appears that someone has decided to pull the word out of the vault and put it back into circulation.

You see it scrawled on shop windows, plastered across printed advertisements, and store clerks are once again wishing their customers a merry Christmas.

Just perhaps, as a nation, we are returning to our spiritual roots. One can only hope.

But even Linus’ wish-list is not enough. It is certainly more noble and less commercial than Lucy’s.

But, there is a problem. At the end of the day, none of those things on his list brings ultimate peace and joy and healing to this tired, old, sin infested world.

The problem you see is not just out there in the world. It is with us . . . as individuals and as a race.

History has shown that while humans have the capacity to love and do do some rather remarkable, **selfless** things, there is, nevertheless, a monster lurking in each one of us.

What is the answer to the human conundrum?

Well, we find it in the message delivered to those shepherds. Hear again the angels' words:

“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

A saviour. That is what we require above all else.

Someone to save us from ourselves and the messes we get ourselves into.

Someone to set us and all creation free from the captivity of sin.

Someone to wield the fatal and final blow to death itself.

“Man,” says Tennyson, **“he thinks he was not made to die.”**

This instinct is correct. We were made for more. And the Saviour – the One whose birth was heralded to the shepherds outside Bethlehem – was, in words of the carol: *Born that man no more may die.*

We celebrate His birth this evening, but not as a stand-alone event. He who was born this night was born to die . . . and to rise . . . and in end to raise us. So, we celebrate the whole package this evening.

In a less-known but quite lovely carol, Christina Rossetti places the story of Jesus' birth in a climate far removed from that of actual Bethlehem. She writes:

*In the bleak midwinter
Frosty wind made moan . . .
Snow had fallen,
Snow on snow.*

The message of the carol comes at the end where she asks: **“Poor as I am . . . what can I give Him?”**

Her answer is **“my heart.”**

That is the right answer to a right question.

Even so, the primary focus of Christmas is not *what I can give Him*, but *what God has given us*.

In the person of His one and only Son, He has given us Himself.

He has entered our muddle and mess.

He has trampled death by death.

He has enabled us to be taken up into the very nature and life of God.

He has sent a Saviour.

If I were on the other side of Lucy's wishbone this evening, my wish would be for people everywhere to see that gift for what it is and to reach out and receive it.

What about you? Have you received it? If not, it's in your reach this evening. It is being extended to you in the quietness of this moment.

Don't go away without Jesus. He is willing to save you and to cleanse you from the mistakes of the past and to set you on a brand new path.

What will be your response? There will never be a better time than now. Don't delay. Reach out and take life's greatest gift.